

# Improving learner self-efficacy in blended online and in-person teaching: findings from Imperial College London School of Public Health

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IMPERIAL

Blended learning comprises variations of online, distance and face-to-face teaching. Factors affecting learner efficacy in blend learning can differ from those in traditional face-to-face teaching.

Evidence from interviews and a focus group of faculty and students at the Imperial College London School of Public Health indicates that students can thrive in blended learning environments, with **creative** and **tailored support** for their needs, and a manageable workload.

Self-efficacy can be maximized through **clearer signposting and feedback**, and provision of **engaging, relatable and realistic online tasks**, which in turn **enhance in-class interactive learning**.

## BACKGROUND

Blended learning at the Imperial College London School of Public Health (implemented in 2021) comprises face-to-face and online learning. Evidence from online learning environments posits characteristics of self-efficacy that are not present in traditional face-to-face learning. (Kuo et al, 2021).

As autonomous agents, learners engage uniquely with blended learning and will attempt to maintain control and motivation for their learning through a self-reflexive process referred to as 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2001).

The aim of this research was to establish how learner self-efficacy could be maximised in blended online and in-person learning.

## METHODS

- Experiences of blended learning and teaching by students, faculty and alumni were explored using a **phenomenological** qualitative research approach.
- Data were collected through one-to-one **interviews** with staff and alumni, and a **focus group** of current students (2022-23 cohort).
- From these data, **themes** were both deductively derived from the literature and inductively developed based on commonality in participant responses.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Study participants

	Eligible and invited to study	Participated in study	Participation
Faculty members	40+	10	1-to-1 Interview
Alumni	135	5	1-to-1 Interview
Current students	138	3	Focus group

- Most students enjoyed some aspect of blended learning and found it to be a positive experience, *"I felt I had a lot of control. I felt very efficient as a learner. I found that I had enough time to actually interact with the lecturers and ask questions. I think in most of the sessions that we have online, there were a lot of opportunities to ask questions..... I thought that I was given quite a lot of space to speak up, because the lectures always ask whether you have questions and whether you need clarification"* (Alumnus e).
- However, several found workload overwhelming, and requested more guidance on how to navigate material, *"...at the same time, it can be quite overwhelming because there's a lot of materials that you have to cover and sometimes you don't really know where to start."* (Alumnus a).

## RESULTS CONTINUED

Table 2: Study themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Physiological arousal (Positive [+] & negative [-] emotions)	Enjoyment/ interest [+]
	Feeling motivated [+]
	Preferences catered for [+]
	Workload pressure [-]
Enactive mastery	Confidence
	Control
	Task completion
	Assessment performance
Vicarious experience	Modelling
Verbal persuasion	Tutor support
	Encouragement & feedback
	Asking questions

- Students and faculty reported that having material to review ahead of interactive face-to-face sessions helped build learner confidence
- Recorded material and transcripts was helpful for both native and non-native English speakers, who consumed material at own pace, then asked any questions from a position of some understanding
- Ability to model others, ask questions and seek encouragement and feedback was limited online

## CONCLUSIONS

Students in the Imperial School of Public Health enjoyed blended learning for its versatility, which allowed them to work at their own pace and according to their preferences

However, it presented greater workload for both faculty and students

To maintain benefits while reducing demands, delivery of blended learning requires investment in staff and technological resources  
At institution level, better support of blended learning requires intentional planning through strategy, policies and guidelines for best practice.

## References

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